

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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R 311320Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY SANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4900

UNCLAS SANA 2605

FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 11652: N/A
TALN: SHUM, YE
SUBJ: JEWS OF YEMEN

REF: SANA 1459

BEGIN SUMMARY: YAR APPARENTLY HEADED TOWARD
DECISION TURN DOWN REQUEST FOR AMERICAN JEWS VISIT
CORELIGIONISTS HERE. END SUMMARY.

1. IBRAHIM AL-KIBSI, HEAD OF POLITICAL SECTION YAR MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TOLD CHARGE ON 31 MAY THAT YAR WAS
APPROACHED BY PLO (YES: THE PALESTINE LIBERATION
ORGANIZATION) TO AGREE TO REQUEST BY GROUP OF AMERICAN
JEWS TO VISIT THEIR CORELIGIONISTS HERE IN YEMEN. PLO
WAS MOVED TO MAKE THIS REQUEST AFTER GROUP OF RABBIS
WHICH IT BELIEVES TO BE ANTI-ZIONIST APPROACHED NEW YORK
OFFICE TO ASK FOR INTERVENTION.

2. ACCORDING TO KIBSI, ISSUE OF VISIT BY AMERICAN
JEWS TO YEMEN HAS BEEN VETTED THROUGH SEVERAL
MINISTERS. CONSENSUS AT MOMENT IS THAT AMERICANS WHO
VISIT YEMEN WILL BE SHOCKED AT CONDITIONS IN WHICH
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JEWS LIVE, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NO BETTER OR WORSE
THAN CONDITIONS FOR OTHER YEMENIS.

3. KIBSI ASKED WHAT I THOUGHT OF THIS DECISION AND
I SAID I THOUGHT IT WAS A MISTAKE. IT DENIED YEMENI
CITIZENS RIGHT WHICH MUSLIMS COULD ENJOY WITHOUT ANY
DIFFICULTY. IT WOULD SUGGEST TO OUTSIDERS THAT YEMENIS

HAD SOMETHING TO FEAR AS RESULT OF SPECIAL POLICY TO ISOLATE OR MISTREAT LOCAL JEWS. IT DISTINGUISHED YEMENI POSITION FROM THAT TAKEN IN RECENT YEARS BY EGYPT, SYRIA AND EVEN IRAQ WHERE VISITS WITH CO-RELIGIONISTS FROM ABROAD ARE CONCERNED. IT COULD CREATE BAD PUBLICITY IN US AND PUT WEAPON IN HANDS OF CRITICS OF ARABS.

I SUGGESTED BEST COURSE WAS FOR YEMENIS TO CONTACT, ON THEIR OWN INITIATIVE, AMERICANS WHO WANTED TO VISIT AND TO DO EVERYTHING TO FACILITATE THEIR VISIT. I CONCLUDED BY POINTING OUT THAT PROBLEM WHICH YEMENIS TRYING TO AVOID WAS NOT GOING TO GO AWAY AND THEY SHOULD SIMPLY MAKE THE BEST OF IT. IF COOPERATION LED TO SOME DEMAND FOR IMMIGRATION, THIS SHOULD NOT SURPRISE OR DISMAY GOVERNMENT WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF IMMIGRANTS ALL OVER WORLD.

4. KIBSI ASKED IF I KNEW HOW MANY JEWS LIVED IN YEMEN AND I SAID I DID NOT BUT THOUGHT THE NUMBER WAS LESS THAN 1,000. HE ASKED IF I KNOW OF ANY PRESSURE FROM THIS GROUP TO LEAVE OR TO COMPLAIN AND AGAIN I SAID I HAD NO INFORMATION ON SUBJECT. I DID KNOW, HOWEVER, FROM ONE UNEXPECTED MEETING WITH ONE JEW IN WADI WAJBARA THAT THERE WAS DESIRE FOR RELIGIOUS BOOKS. I TOLD KIBSI THAT AMBASSADOR SCOTES HAD EARLIER RELATED ACCOUNT OF THIS MEETING TO YEMENI OFFICIALS AND URGED THEM TO ACT
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TO SATISFY RELIGIOUS NEEDS OF THEIR OWN CITIZENS. I SAID I THOUGHT MUSLIMS COULD DO NO LESS THAN THIS.

COMMENT: KIBSI LISTENED CAREFULLY AND NODDED AT SEVERAL POINTS, ESPECIALLY WHEN I STRESSED NEED TO ALLOW JEWS TO PRACTICE THEIR OWN RELIGION. HOWEVER, QUESTION OF VISITS IS PAINFUL SUBJECT AND I HAVE NO DOUBT THEY WILL TRY TO AVERT SUCH VISITS AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. I THINK THAT FOR MOMENT IT IS BEST FOR US TO KEEP EXCHANGES ON UNOFFICIAL AND VERY LOW KEY LEVEL, RESPONDING TO YEMENI INITIATIVES AS IN MY DISCUSSION WITH KIBSI. IT WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF WE HAD REQUEST FOR HELP FROM AMERICAN CITIZENS BUT BEST SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM WOULD BE TO LET YEMENIS TAKE INITIATIVE IN WHAT THEY SEE AS THEIR OWN BEST INTEREST IN THIS MATTER. I DO NOT PLAN TO RAISE THE SUBJECT, IN ANY CASE, UNLESS INSTRUCTED TO DO SO.
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